

LIPI Report – Belief systems in Sampela

Section 1 – how relevant is traditional Bajo religion in Sampela today?

The aim of this section is to establish what the basis is for the traditional Bajo religion of Sampela, through the following objectives:

- To find out what aspect takes precedence in people's lives, Bajo traditional religion or Islam
- To find out in detail what aspects of Bajo traditional religion people use
- To establish what people believe outsiders and fundamentalist Muslims think about the combination of Islam and Bajo religion, as a preliminary investigation as to whether it has been shaped by external pressure

Section 2 – to what extent is Sampela an Islamic community?

Having established the role of traditional religion in Sampela, the aim of this section is to examine how the fundamental principles of Islam are affected and compromised by the apparent contradictions of the Bajo belief system. To achieve this the following objectives will be met:

- To establish whether Bajo people consider themselves to be Muslims
- To establish people's knowledge of Islamic practices and life-cycle ceremonies (circumcision, marriage and funerals), both as a measure of Islamic fundamentalism and, by comparing the consistencies the cross-section's answers, to establish the strength of the Islamic community in Sampela
- To establish the extent to which people consider traditional religion to be compatible with and relevant to Islam, as a way of investigating whether they have had to compromise their tradition to follow Islam, and again as a way of measuring the fundamentalism of Islam in Sampela

Section 3 – what are the motivations and justification that produce and are reproduced by the dichotomy between Islam and traditional Bajo religion in Sampela?

Having established the relative importance within people's lives of Bajo traditional religion and Islam, the aim of this section is to find out how people justify following two apparently conflicting religions, and the motivations that account for the varying degrees of Islamic fundamentalism within Bajo society, particularly between the sub-districts of Pagana and Sampela

- To find out what people consider Islam to offer that traditional religion does not
- To find out whether the personal benefits of being a Muslim are related to modernisation, particularly the pursuit of wealth and a higher standing within society
- To establish the extent to which the apparent growth of Islam in Sampela is due to the overriding view in Indonesia that belonging to a 'world religion' is synonymous with development

Methodology

Each section consisted of a questionnaire aimed at a wide cross-section of Bajo society, including traditionalists, modernists and Muslims, as well as Sanros (traditional healers) and village authorities. Additional observational data was collected at a circumcision ceremony, a village meeting, a traditional Bajo ceremony and general day to day life in Sampela

Findings

1. Bajo adat (tradition and culture)
 - Bajo adat consists of requests and offerings to ancestors, in the form of sea spirits, for better health and luck
 - The practical nature of this religion there is no weekly ritual, or communal aspect – instead it is of an individualistic nature, used only as needed
2. Bajo Islam
 - Most Bajo know the basic practices required by Islam, such as praying five times a day, fasting during the Ramadan month, and paying zakat (voluntary almsgiving) at the end of that month, but few could elaborate with details

- The only practices everyone performs are life-cycle ceremonies, such as circumcision, marriage and funerals, moderated with adat influences, generally revolving around the celebratory party
3. Village motivations
 - Most say outsiders approve of adat – however, in Indonesia recognised religions, particularly Islam, are synonymous with education and development
 - As such, whilst large numbers only visit the Mosque for big events, it serves other purposes in indicating good development, and so good conduct and education for the Bajo people, as a way of dispelling the prejudices and discrimination of outsiders towards Sampela
 - The highly moral based ethos of Islam also allays people’s fears of the effects of modernisation on Bajo society, such as increased gambling, drinking and fighting
 4. Personal motivations
 - Bajo adat is responsible for a person’s practical, basic needs: motivations for practicing, or being seen to practice Islam include a better afterlife, respect from having a Muslim identity that Bajo adat does not provide, and joining ‘better’ groups of people which will reinforce the previous point
 - Although many said the wealth gained from having greater respect from potential business partners was seen as unimportant, many traditionalists pointed out that in order to have enough time to carry out the various Islamic practices one would need enough money not to need to work for the majority of the day
 - Most people also wanted their children to become good Muslims for a good life, greater intelligence and to avoid bad conduct and hard work
 5. Patterns of change
 - Every person questioned stated that Islam is more important than Bajo adat. However, the motivations and benefits of making statements such as this mean it is not as simple Islam overshadowing and eliminating Bajo adat
 - Whilst there are a variety of opinions, the general consensus among strict Muslim from outside and within Sampela is that a number of aspects of Bajo adat are irrelevant and even contradictory to Islam, something that is generally admitted by most adat practitioners
 - There are a range of justifications for this, from people’s obligations to their ancestors to peer pressure. However, the most telling one is the separation between adat and animism
 6. Adat v animism
 - Bajo religion, generally consisting of their relationship with sea spirits, is widely perceived by outsiders as animism, or animated nature. However, the Indonesian word for animism, berhala, also means idolisation, which is the most contradictory element of Bajo adat.
 - As such, those that are aware of this compartmentalise it such that land based animism, such as worshipping trees, rocks and mountains, counts as berhala, but sea spirits do not
 - This is indicative of the connotations of land and sea to the Bajo, where land based berhala is seen as contradictory where sea-based is seen as relevant
 - Most interestingly, those that make this distinction are self proclaimed strict Muslims, who have the most to lose from practicing berhala, whereas more traditional Bajo tend not to, because they are unaware of or do not care that berhala is contradictory
 - As such, among both Muslims and traditionalists, Bajo adat and Islam are able to co-exist simultaneously, despite their contradictions. The factors behind the varying balance of adat and Islam in people’s lives can be best examined geographically
 7. Geography and community
 - Sampela is split into two sub-district, the traditional Pagana and more developed and modern Sampela
 - Another distinction is that people in Sampela are generally stricter Muslims than in Pagana. Many of these Muslims are from other villages and so are familiar with outsider influences, and are richer and so have greater access to education and more time in which to practice
 - Most of the Bajo of Pagana have always lived in the village. They are more likely to be traditionalists, and so are more individualistic due to the lack of communal aspects of Bajo adat, and the prevalence of fishing activities in their daily lives
 - Conversely, residents of Sampela have been able to form good relations with the Mosque leader, which encourages notions of community, reinforcing the strength of Islam through peer pressure among adults and particularly children
 - This is embodied by the high number of children from Sampela who attend the Islamic school in Kaledupa, compared to the two from Pagana